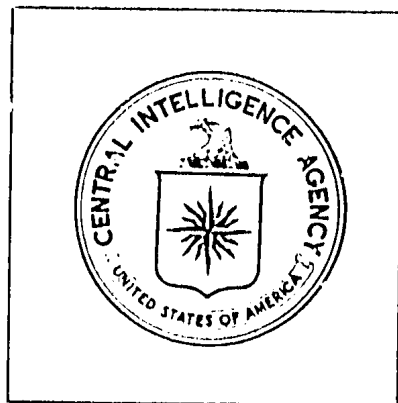


CIAOGCR RP 75-18 Apr 75
Potential for Refugee Resettlement on Phu Quoc Island

C 1 of 1
GCR RP 75-18

~~Confidential~~



*Potential For Refugee Resettlement
On Phu Quoc Island*

~~Confidential~~

GCR RP 75-18
APRIL 1975

POTENTIAL FOR REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT ON PHU QUOC ISLAND

Phu Quoc, a dagger-shaped island in the Gulf of Thailand, lies about 30 miles west of Ha Tien, the nearest point on the South Vietnamese mainland, and less than 10 miles from the Cambodian coast. Isolated from the South Vietnamese mainland (there is no regular ferry service), Phu Quoc has suffered from neglect by the Saigon Government and is lightly populated and little developed. Administratively, the island is one of seven districts of Kien Giang Province. By far the largest of South Vietnam's islands, it covers an area of about 266 square miles and measures 25 miles from north to south, 18 miles from east to west. The southern "blade", however, narrows from a 12-mile width in the north to only 2 miles in the south.* Although Phu Quoc's major settlements and principal agricultural areas are under Saigon's control, much of the interior and the entire northern part of the island are controlled by the Viet Cong.

The northern part of the island is extremely rugged (elevations to 1,850 feet) and blanketed throughout with dense rain forest. It is roadless and virtually unpopulated. The rugged terrain and dense forest cover will probably preclude refugee resettlement, at least for the time being. The southern part of the island is lower -- a maximum elevation of 1,000 feet -- with more open forest and brushland, and it is here that nearly all of the island's 13,000 to 15,000 people live. Many of the southern lowlands are poorly drained and much of the coast is mangrove-lined. These areas would require extensive drainage improvement for resettlement. Other lowland areas, however, are well drained and, after clearing of the forest, could probably support sizable refugee populations. Parts of the southwest coast are sandy and have rich offshore fishing grounds. Although already lined with fishing villages, it could probably support a much larger population than it now does.

The southwest coast receives an average of about 125 inches of rainfall yearly with 85 percent falling during the southwest monsoon, May through October. Southwestern-facing slopes in

* See Map Series L7014, 1:50,000, Sheets 5279I and 5279II.

CONFIDENTIAL

the interior probably receive considerably more rainfall. The rainfall regime throughout the island is suitable for one-crop rice production without irrigation, and two crops if irrigation facilities are developed.

Phu Quoc's population includes several thousand refugees from North Vietnam who, after stops on the mainland, settled on the island after partition of Vietnam in 1954. A group of several hundred Nung refugees from Long Khanh Province settled on the island in the mid-1960's. The population also includes a large number of Chinese. Most are long-time settlers but some, according to a 1968 report, are wealthy Chinese businessmen from Cholon who settled in the main town of Duong Dong to avoid the military upheavals of the mainland. A sprinkling of Cambodians also live on the island. The population is mostly Buddhist although there is a fairly large North Vietnamese Catholic contingent in An Thoi, the second largest town, several hundred Cao Dai, and perhaps a few Hoa Hao.

About half of the people live in the two principal towns -- Duong Dong on the southwest coast and An Thoi at the southern tip of the island. Duong Dong has an estimated population of more than 4,000; An Thoi's population is 2,500 or so. Most of the rest live in small fishing villages along the southwest coast or along the 24 miles of roads that link Duong Dong with An Thoi.

Both Duong Dong and An Thoi are essentially fishing towns; their harbors are jammed with fishing junks and their streets lined with pungent processing factories. An Thoi, occupied primarily by a close-knit group of Catholic refugees from North Vietnam, has been described by visitors as having neat houses and clean streets. An ARVN POW camp, which in 1968 housed some 11,500 NVA/VC prisoners, is located just to the north of the town. Duong Dong has been described as having a mixed and morose population; most of the people occupy rows of shabby houses on stilts along the banks of the Trach Duong Dong (river). A small naval base is located in the town and a 2,300-foot air strip and ARVN radar installation are nearby.

The island has little economic significance to the GVN; its major contribution to the economy to date has been fish and fish products. Its potential for expanded production of

fish products, lumber, and cash crops, however, appears significant. Perhaps one-third of the people are fishermen with many of the rest employed in the fish processing industries. The most famous product of the island is "nuoc mam," a fermented and pungent sauce made from a small coastal fish. There are more than 30 nuoc mam plants in An Thoi and Duong Dong. Production of pepper from a few small plantations in the interior valleys and lumber from the rich forests have been the island's only other economic activities worthy of note. A tax on the pepper producers has been the major source of VC revenues. Phu Quoc produces only a small amount of rice and must import from Rach Gia, the province capital and main port. Soils and climate, however, favor expanded rice production. Production of all commodities has suffered from the war. Pepper and lumber output is limited because they are produced in the VC-controlled interior and fish and nuoc mam because poor coastal security has forced the GVN to limit the fishermen to small zones outside the harbors of the fishing villages.